

## Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas

Beliefs and Customs — Pockets

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Works Progress Administration 49 WEST DUVAL STREET JACKSONVILLE

## Library of Congress

Roy Schroder State Administrator

May 23, 1939

Mr. Henry G. Alsberg Director Federal Writers' Project 1734 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D. C.

Attention: Dr. B. A. Botkin

Dear Mr. Alsberg:

The enclosed "Proposed Recording Expedition Into the Floridas" was written by Zora Neale Hurston, Negro editor of the Florida Project.

I believe that Zora can assist the expedition in getting excellent and original recordings in the State. If possible, she should accompany the expedition on its trip through Florida, as she has an intimate knowledge of folk song and folklore sources in the State.

Sincerely, Carita Doggett Corse  
Carita Doggett Corse State Director Federal Writers' Project

CDC:dw Encl. 1

### PROPOSED RECORDING EXPEDITION INTO THE FLORIDAS

So far as material worthy of preservation by recordings, Florida stands out from the other forty-eight states culturally as it does geographically.

#### **Area I.**

Got my knap-sack on my back  
My rifle on my shoulder  
Kill me a nigger 'fore Saturday  
Night  
If I have to hunt Flordy over.

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(Sung by Waldo Wishart, Ocala, Florida)

West Florida extends from the Perdido River on the west to Lake City on the east . , from the Alabama-Georgia State lines on the north to as far south as Gilchrist County on the south. This is the Florida so well known to Spanish-French-English-Indian fighting tradition. The material is plentiful. There are men and women still alive who know and can tell of the struggles of four different groups of people to control this area. There are the Creole songs and customs of Pensacola and surrounding area. There are the African-American Negro folk tales in abundance and the religious and secular songs in plenty. This is a sort of culture pocket that is not being drained off so rapidly as other sections of the State.

The reason for this is that this section of Florida is the cotton-corn-tobacco region. Here people live under the patriarchal agrarian system. The old rules of life hold here. Down on the Gulf Coast of this section are large fishing and oyster settlements with their songs and traditions. West Florida is a very rich and little touched area. It is worth an expedition in itself. In addition to the purely cultural W3555 material to be found it is possible to make recordings that bear on the economic and sociological set-up of the area. The new is hurling itself, not so effectually , against the old and the feudal life. The interviews should be particularly interesting. The shipyards and the like are the culture beds of other maritime folk creations. A serious study of blank verse in the form of traditional sermons and prayers.

### **Area II.**

De Cap'n cant read, de Cap'n cant write How does he know that the time is right? I asked my Cap'n what de time of day He got mad and throwed his watch away.

(Sung by Willie Joe Roberts, Jacksonville, Fla.)

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From the St. Mary's River, which is the Georgia-Florida boundary line, to Gainesville on the south, and from Lake City to the Atlantic Ocean is Northeast Florida.

In this area we have a conglomerate of many cultures. There is the Georgia-Alabama "Cracker" with his farms and cows, his old-English traditions and ways. But here also are the descendants of the great old English, French and Spanish families and their monuments and culture. And occupation, the matrix of culture creation among peoples is in this area in a lavish way. In addition to the vast number of songs and the like handed down from England, there is a lavish of the stuff created by both black and white around their works. From Fernandina, Mayport and St. Augustine there is the lusty material of the sea folk, Jacksonville is a great port with its hustling, chanting stevedores and roustabouts. The Jacksonville-Callahan area is full of railroad songs, chants and stories.

Ah Mobile! Hauh! Ah in Alabama! Hauh! Ah Fort Myers! Hauh! Ah in Florida! Hauh! Ah lets shake it! Hauh! Ah lets break it! Hauh! Ah lets shake it! Hauh! Ah just a hair! Hauh!

(Sung by Fred James Watson, 1225 W. Duval St. (Jacksonville, Florida)

In this same area there are men like old "Pap" Drummond of Fernandina who tell tales of the Pirates who roamed the Spanish Main and tell of buried treasures. Pap Drummond lives in his shack on the outskirts of Fernandina with his "family" of rattlesnakes rustling now and then in their dugout near at hand, and draws a long bow on the lawless men of the skull and crossbones of yesteryear. He claims to have aided in the last recovery of pirate treasure.

Interviews with the Turpentine-Timber workers of this area would be extremely interesting. There has seeped in some impulse to change the old for the new and the comments of the laborers are very interesting from a sociological viewpoint.

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There are rivermen in this area who have plied the St. John's River for more than one generation with their songs, stories and observations. Some have seen the last of the Indian fighters go. Look for the roots of traditional sermons and prayers.

### Area III.

I got a woman, she shake like jelly all over I got a woman she shake like jelly all over Her hips so broad Lawd, Lawd her hips so broad.

(Sung by Richard Jenkins, Mulberry, Fla.)

And they found him, found him in between two mountains And they found him, found him in between two mountains With head hung down, Lawd, Lawd with head hung down.

(Sung by Richard Jenkins, Mulberry, Fla.)

From the Palatka — Gainesville line south to Tarpon Springs on the West Coast and Fore Pierce on the East Coast is a section of Peninsular Florida devoted to citrus fruits, turpentine, lumber, phosphate, celery and tourists. This area includes the justly famous Polk County, so full of varied industries that it is full of song and story. The most robust and lusty songs of road and camp sprout in this area like corn in April. "Uncle Bud" Planchita "Ella Wall" and other real characters poured into song and shaped into legend. It would be profitable in this region to make a series of recordings on John, Jack, Big John, de Conquer (or) that great hero of Negro folklore who is Brer Rabbit and Brer Rabbit is him.

Look for fine examples of those folk poems in blank verse known as sermons and prayers.

### Area IV.

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Evalina, Evalina you know the baby dont favor me, Eh, Eh, you know the baby dont favor me.

(Sung by Lias Strawn, Miami, Fla. Drummed by “Stew Beef”)

South Florida: This is the foriegn culture area of Florida. Thst is foriegn culture has not yet absorbed into the general pattern of the locality, or just beginning to make its influence felt in American culture. This foriegn area really should be designated as a collection of areas. The Sanctified Church is strong in this area with its rebirth of spiritual and anthem making.

A. Tarpon Springs — A Greek sponge-fishing area with its Greek Orthodox ceremonies and other folk songs and customs.

B. Tampa — With the largest Latin colony in the United States. Here the Cuban songs, dances and folk ways color the soil and flavor the air.

C. Miami — A polyg h l ot of Caribbean and South American cultures.

1. More than 30,000 Bahamans with their songs, dances and stories, and instrumentation.
2. Haitian songs, dances, instrumentation and celebrations.
3. American Negro songs, games and dances.
4. American white songs and stories.
5. African songs, dances and instrumentation. There is a pure African colony there.

D. Everglades — Raw, teeming life of the frontiers and mining or construction camp type. A hot mixture of all the types of material of the area. Worth the whole trip alone. The life histories, Social, Ethnic studies would be rare and vital.

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E. Key West to Palm Beach - Bahaman and Cuban elements in abundance. Also the conch settlement at Riviera. All new to study and worth a great deal of investigation.

SUMMARY: There is no State in the Union with as much to record in a musical, folk lore, Social-Ethnic way as Florida has. To be sure California has the Chinese, Japanese, Philipino population which Florida lacks, but these Asiatic cultures seem so far from our own that they do not enter the stream of American culture at all. No other State in the Union has had the history of races blended and contending. Nowhere else is there such a variety of materials. Florida is still a frontier with its varying elements still unassimilated. There is still an opportunity to observe the wombs of folk culture still heavy with life. Recordings in Florida will be like backtracking a large part of the United States, Europe and Africa for these elements have been attracted here and brought a gift to Florida culture each in its own way. The drums throb: Africa by way of Cuba; Africa by way of the British West Indies; Africa by way of Haiti and Martin i que; Africa by way of Central and South America. Old Spain speaks through many interpreters. Old England speaks through black, w h ite and intermediate lips. Florida, the inner melting pot of the great melting pot — America.

### **(Sanctified Anthem)**

O Lord, O Lord Let the words of my mouth, O Lord Let the words of my mouth, meditations of my heart Be accepted in Thy sight, O Lord.

(Sung by Mrs. Orrie Jones, Palm Beach, Florida)

Respectfully submitted Zora Neale Hurston